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SUBJECT: DR CONGO QUARTERLY REFUGEE REPORT, JUNE 2008

¶1. (SBU) Summary: UNHCR reports repatriation of over 10,600 Congolese as of June 2008. There are currently over 338,000 Congolese refugees in neighboring countries and over 176,000 refugees from other countries in the DRC. Repatriation of Congolese from Tanzania has recently halted, repatriation from Zambia recently began, and repatriation from Uganda is planned to begin within the next year. Sustainable peace is essential to resolve refugee and IDP issues in the DRC. Humanitarian officials are concerned about the consequences of any new military offensive in eastern DRC. End Summary.

Return of Congolese refugees to the DRC

¶2. (U) As of mid-June 2008, UNHCR has assisted 6,710 Congolese refugees to return to Equateur province, 1,500 to South Kivu province, and 2,410 to Katanga province during the year. There are no estimates of non-assisted returns for 2008.

DRC refugees in African countries

¶3. (U) UNHCR estimates 338,423 Congolese refugees are currently in other African countries. Tanzania has the largest number, with 94,942. Zambia hosts 54,687, Rwanda 50,687, Uganda 39,950, Burundi 24,400, Republic of Congo 21,768 and Central African Republic 1,825. An additional 50,164 are located in other countries.

Refugees hosted by DRC

¶4. (U) As of April 2008, 176,121 refugees from other countries were living in the DRC. They are from Angola (112,705), Rwanda (28,521), Burundi (17,602), Uganda (13,905), Sudan (2,511), Republic of Congo (781), Central African Republic (39) and other countries (57).

Congolese IDPs

¶5. (U) UNHCR estimates there are currently 1,364,578 IDPs in the DRC: 846,699 in North Kivu, 266,140 in Sud Kivu, 152,369 in Ituri District, 68,022 elsewhere in Orientale province, and 31,348 in Katanga.

Repatriation from Zambia

¶6. (U) The fourth meeting of the Tripartite Commission for repatriation of Congolese refugees in Zambia took place April 15-17 in Lubumbashi. UNICEF, WHO, and FAO participated as observers. The Commission confirmed plans for voluntary repatriation from Zambia to Moba and Kalemie of 19,336 Congolese in 41 convoys, 34 by boat via Mpulungu and seven by road via Pweto.

¶7. (U) A Tripartite delegation visited camps in Kala and Mwange,

Zambia April 27-30 to address refugees' questions about security, infrastructure, education, health and employment hindering their return to the DRC. Voluntary repatriation began May 2. UNHCR Moba launched 2008 repatriation operations in Nord and Haut Katanga on May 4.

Repatriation from Uganda

18. (U) The DRC-Uganda-UNHCR Tripartite Technical Working Group met for the first time in Kinshasa June 11-12 to begin discussions on an agreement for repatriation of Congolese refugees in Uganda. The group agreed on a legal framework for further consultations aimed at finalizing an agreement later this year. A UNHCR official told us they also agreed to a timetable that would begin repatriation of Congolese refugees in July 2009.

Repatriation from Tanzania

19. (U) Repatriation of Congolese refugees in Tanzania has halted, according to UNHCR officials in Bukavu and Uvira, South Kivu. PolOff and Regional RefCoord visited an empty refugee transit center in Uvira May 17 and were told by a center official that he did not know when the next refugee returns would take place. Many Congolese refugees once volunteered for repatriation from Tanzania, however those that remain have been there many years and established Tanzanian roots. They are opposed to repatriation at this time. UNHCR officials told us that it is difficult to convince these refugees that the conditions are right for return to the DRC.

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10. (SBU) Comment: Sustainable peace in the DRC's eastern provinces is essential to resolving longstanding refugee and IDP issues. UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations continue to express concern that a military offensive against the FDLR or failure of the Amani program could create additional obstacles further hindering resolution of these issues. End comment.

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